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Family, friends scour fields for missing woman

Farmersville police will continue to interview acquaintances in hunt

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By IAN McCANN / The Dallas Morning News

FARMERSVILLE – Hundreds of volunteers, friends and family members searched fields and other areas in rural eastern Collin County for a woman missing since Wednesday night.

Rachelle O'Neil Tolleson, 20, was last seen about 10:30 p.m. Wednesday, after she drove her mother home. Police said they are treating it as a missing person case, but authorities have said the situation appears to be suspicious.

The missing woman's 6-month-old daughter was left alone at home, and baby formula was left inside the back door of her home.

"We had bloodhounds and search dogs at the house," Farmersville police Sgt. Michael O'Day said. "But they lose the trail right outside the house, so we think she left somehow in a vehicle."

Sgt. O'Day said investigators will continue to interview Ms. Tolleson's acquaintances and will conduct polygraph examinations this week with help from the Collin County sheriff's office.

Searchers organized by United Response Search and Rescue on foot, horseback and all-terrain vehicles combed through fields, an old rock quarry and construction sites looking for any sign of Ms. Tolleson. Dive teams are ready if water searches are needed, said Dana Ames, the nonprofit search organization's operations director. The group is working in conjunction with law enforcement.

"The ground searches are very critical," Ms. Ames said. "There are a couple of areas of particular interest, so it's not completely arbitrary where we're looking."

Ms. Ames said she could not disclose what areas were receiving the most attention or why.

In the field, teams lined up an arm's length from each other and slowly scanned acres of land. Searchers included firefighters from across the area, family members, friends and complete strangers.

"The most important thing is not speed," Daniel Little, a search team leader at a former rock quarry west of town, said Sunday afternoon. "It's to be thorough. We're going to cover as much ground as time permits, but we have to be able to see everything."

Searchers peered down abandoned wells and poked through thick underbrush but found little that could contribute to the case.

"It can be the littlest things," said Mr. Little, who has been on several high-profile search teams in the Dallas-Fort Worth area. "Flies, smells, disturbed earth, jewelry, clothing. Sometimes it'll be a barrette in a field that just doesn't belong there."

A cousin of Ms. Tolleson, Rick Ambriati of Wylie, said he was pleased to see so many people joining the search effort.

"There is a bunch of people, a lot of people I've never met before," he said. "These people are being really helpful."

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